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ABSTRACT

Research has suggested that physical attractiveness contributes to subjects' perception of female competency. This finding has generated interest in investigating the effect of physical attractiveness on subjects' perceptions of competency in male and female therapists. Undergraduates (N=192) viewed a 15-minute videotaped session reflecting either an attractive or unattractive male or female psychotherapist who exhibited either a directive or a nondirective therapeutic style. Following the videotape observation, subjects rated 30 items on an adjective list according to the degree that the items were descriptive of the therapist. Subjects also rated the therapist on the basis of how much they liked him/her. Results showed that the female therapist was least preferred and was rated as less competent only when she was attractive and when she exhibited a nondirective style. The attractive, nondirective female therapist was perceived as less confident, sure, and skilled than all the other therapists except for the unattractive male nondirective therapist. The findings suggest that subjects appear to show differential responses to the attractiveness of the therapist depending on the gender of the therapist. (NRB)

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THERAPIST COMPETENCY AS A FUNCTION OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

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Therapist Competency as a Function of Physical Attractiveness

Recently some investigators have posited that physical attractiveness contributes to subjects' perception of female competency. Fugita, Panek, Balascoe, and Newman (1977) found that subjects rated essays purportedly written by a highly attractive female as more competent than identical essays purportedly written by an average attractiveness female. Also, Murphy (1976) found that subjects consistently rated the paintings paired with a photograph of an attractive female artist significantly higher than the same identical paintings paired with an unattractive female photograph artist. These effects were explained in terms of "what is beautiful, is good" stereotype.

These findings have generated some interest in investigating how physical attractiveness affects subjects' perceptions of male and female therapists. However, in the ratings of attractive and unattractive female therapists, findings are more inconclusive, perhaps due to the interaction effects of the attractiveness and sex-role stereotypes. Rae (1975) utilized a 10-minute videotape of a counseling session with a female therapist. Cosmetically the female therapist was made to look attractive or unattractive. Rae found a nonsignificant trend suggesting that female subjects were more attracted to, and persuaded by, an unattractive female therapist than by an attractive female therapist.

However, a more recent study (Carter, 1978) using a different methodology (photographs) found no support for the previously reported findings by Cash, Thomas, Begley, McCown, and Weisse (1975), using

videotapes, of a clear and positive effect for physical attractiveness with male therapists. Instead, she reported that female counselors, particularly in the attractive condition, received higher ratings than male counselors. These findings are contradictory to the suggestive trend reported by Rae (1975).

Perhaps the inconsistency of the above findings can be accounted for by the findings of Hill and Lando (1976), who employed a masculine- and feminine-typed task and had subjects rate performances on these tasks which were paired with attractive and unattractive male and female photographs. Photographs of attractive females elicited relatively higher ratings of success on the feminine-typed tasks. No differences were found between the attractive and the unattractive females on the masculine-typed tasks. Thus, subjects' sex-role stereotype responses may or may not be triggered depending on the degree of physical attractiveness displayed by the female stimulus person and whether the task is masculine or feminine typed.

The present study was designed to further investigate the relationship between male and female competency and attractiveness by manipulating the sex-typed nature of psychotherapy. Two different therapeutic styles were employed--a directive and nondirective style. A directive therapist takes charge and, hence, behaves in a stereotypically male fashion. A nondirective therapist listens and empathizes with the client. These are stereotypically female behaviors.

Therefore, it was predicted that subjects would prefer the attractive nondirective female therapist and the unattractive directive female

therapist. That is, it was expected that attractiveness would enhance the subjects' perception of female competency in the feminine-typed task (nondirective style), but not on the male-typed task (directive style). Male therapists were expected to be rated highly regardless of sex role stereotypes. Atractiveness was expected to enhance the perception of male competency as derived from the "what is beautiful, is good" stereotype. Thus, the attractive male therapist was expected to receive higher ratings regardless of therapeutic style.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 192 volunteer undergraduate students. Half of the subjects were male, and half of the subjects were female. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of eight groups. The experimenters were two undergraduates--one male and one female--assigned randomly to conditions to counterbalance possible effects due to sex of the experimenter.

Instruments

Eight videotapes of a 15-minute psychotherapy session were made. The scripts for these therapy sessions were developed by this writer and reflect either a directive (Rational-Emotive) therapeutic style (i.e., the therapist gives directions and suggestions to clients) or a nondirective (Rogerian) therapeutic style (i.e., the therapist reflects client's feelings and statements and does not give suggestions). The directive and nondirective scripts were played by two male therapists and two female therapists resulting in eight videotapes--i.e., directive male therapists 1 and 2, nondirective male therapists 1 and 2, directive female therapists 1 and 2, nondirective female therapists 1 and 2.

To insure that the videotapes were indeed reflecting a directive and nondirective style of therapy, an independent sample of 10 psychotherapists rated the scripts on one 7-point scale designed by the writer to assess the directiveness of therapists. The male and female stimulus-therapists were selected on the basis of similar age and experience. They were rated on competence, attractiveness, warmth, and credibility as they played the scripts by a sample of 10 undergraduate judges on five 7-point rating scales.

An adjective list containing 30 items was administered. Subjects were asked to rate all the adjectives according to the degree to which they found them descriptive of the therapist they had just viewed.

Procedure

The subjects were randomly assigned to eight experimental groups. An equal number of male and female subjects was assigned to each of the eight groups. Once assigned, all subjects were administered the consent form, and they were told that the study was designed to investigate which type of psychotherapeutic style is generally preferred by clients of the college population. After presentation of the videotape, subjects were administered the Adjective List. In addition, subjects were asked to assign from 1 to 100 points to the therapist on the basis of how much they liked him/her (Liking rating). Data were analyzed with a multivariate 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance including two levels of attractiveness, therapeutic style, and therapist-sex.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data from the ratings of the 10 undergraduate judges were analyzed using the Friedman test to determine if therapists differed on perceived skillfulness, attractiveness, warmth, and credibility. Judges' ratings of therapists' attractiveness were found to significantly differ for the four therapists, $X_7^2 = 17$, $p < .05$. Mean therapist attractiveness ratings are presented in Table 1.

However, no significant attractiveness differences were found between female number 1 and male number 1, $X_7^2 = 1.29$, $p > .05$; and between female number 2 and male number 2, $X_7^2 = 6.39$, $p > .05$. Judges' ratings on the other four 7-point scales (skillfulness, warmth, interest in the client, and credibility) were not found to be significant (see Table 2). Therefore, female number 1 was comparable in attractiveness to male number 1, but significantly different in attractiveness from male and female number 2, who did not significantly differ from each other. Mean ratings for the eight videotapes on these variables are presented in Table 1.

The Sign test was used to analyze the directiveness and nondirectiveness of the directive and nondirective scripts. Ten professional judges rated the directive script as significantly more directive than the nondirective script (10,10; $p = .002$). The nondirective script was also rated as significantly more nondirective than the directive script (10,10; $p = .002$).

General Results

To confirm that subjects did, indeed, perceive female and male therapists number 1 as less attractive than female and male therapists

number 2, two-tail t tests were performed on the means for each therapist on the variable "ugly" (presented in Table 3). Consistent with the preliminary analyses on attractiveness, female therapist number 1 was rated as significantly uglier than female number 2, $t(1,94) = 3.58$, $p > .001$. Also, male therapist number 1 was rated as significantly uglier than male therapist number 2, $t(1,94) = 3.095$, $p > .01$. However, male and female therapists number 1 did not significantly differ from each other, $t(1,94) = 1.987$, $p > .05$. The same was true for male and female number 2, who also did not differ from each other, $t(1,94) = .215$, $p > .05$. Hence, when judges rated therapists on attractiveness, they seemed to be referring to physical attractiveness. Results from a multivariate analysis of variance designed as a manipulation check for therapeutic style are presented in Table 7.

Results from the 2 x 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of variance are presented in Table 4. As can be seen, at a probability level of less than .05, the following variables are significant for the factors of therapist-sex and level of attractiveness: the liking rating, reflecting, effective, helpful, unsure, unskilled, confident, and competent.

Duncan's Multiple Range test was used to further investigate these findings. Mean ratings on these variables are presented in Table 5. For the Liking rating, the attractive female therapist received significantly fewer points than the unattractive female and male therapists and than the attractive male therapists, who did not significantly from each other (see Table 6). The attractive female therapist was also perceived as significantly less confident and competent and more unsure and unskilled

than the attractive male therapist and unattractive female therapist. There were no significant differences between the attractive female therapist and the unattractive male therapist on the above-mentioned variables (confident, competent, unsure, and unskilled). No other significant differences were found.

In addition, a multivariate analysis of variance for the factors of therapeutic style, therapist-sex, and attractiveness was performed to determine if therapeutic style contributed to subjects' preferences for attractive and unattractive male and female therapists. A significant interaction effect was found for the variables Unsure, Unskilled, and Confident. Duncan's Multiple Range test was used to further investigate these findings.

The attractive nondirective female therapist was perceived as significantly more unsure and unskilled and as significantly less confident than: (1) the attractive directive female therapist, $W(1,176) = .66, .71, .66$, respectively, $p < .05$; (2) the unattractive female directive therapist, $W(1,176) = 1.12, .84, 1.0$, respectively, $p < .05$; (3) the unattractive nondirective female therapist, $W(1,176) = 1.0, 1.13, .63$, respectively, $p < .05$; (4) the attractive male directive therapist, $W(1,176) = .83, .80, 1.0$, respectively, $p < .05$; (5) the attractive male nondirective therapist, $W(1,176) = .78, .84, .79$, respectively, $p < .05$; (6) the unattractive male directive therapist, $W(1,176) = 1.16, .87, 1.25$, respectively, $p < .05$. No significant difference was found between the attractive female nondirective therapist and the unattractive male nondirective therapist, $W(1,176) = .04, .295, 0.0$, respectively, $p > .05$.

Discussion

Subjects appeared to show a differential response to the attractiveness of the therapist depending on whether the therapist was male or female. The attractive female therapist did not differ from the unattractive male therapist in subjects' perceptions of how sure, confident, competent, and skillful the therapist appeared. However, the attractive male and unattractive female therapists were perceived as significantly more confident, competent, sure, and skilled than the attractive female therapist. More specifically, the attractive nondirective female therapist was perceived as less confident, sure, and skilled than all the other therapists except for the unattractive male nondirective therapist.

Thus, when the female therapist was unattractive or exhibiting a directive therapeutic style, no differences were found between subjects' preferences for a male or a female therapist. Subjects seem to respond more favorably when the female therapist is unattractive than when she is attractive and exhibiting a nondirective therapeutic style (stereotypically feminine).

Perhaps these findings with female therapists can be explained by the fact that perhaps the role of a therapist was perceived by subjects as more masculine-typed regardless of therapeutic style. Thus, an unattractive directive female therapist may exhibit characteristics which are more congruent (less feminine) with the role of a therapist (male) than a nondirective and attractive female therapist (more feminine).

The fact that Carter (1978) did not find significant findings in the direction of the present research can, perhaps, be accounted for

(1) the different methodologies employed in the two studies, (2) her dependent measures loading on stereotypically feminine or neutral items, or (3) a combination of (1) and (2). It may be that subjects' ratings of a therapist based on a photograph and a 2-minute audiotaped self description is different from subjects' ratings of a therapist conducting a therapy session with a client or even from a videotaped self introduction. Cash et al. (1975) found that, with a videotape presentation, a physically unattractive male counselor was perceived less favorably than a physically attractive male counselor. Yet Carter, using the same identical audio 2-minute self-introduction, but a photograph rather than a videotape presentation, found no such differences.

The findings from the present study are consistent with findings from studies using videotape presentation. The present study noted a trend with the male therapists in that the unattractive male therapist did not significantly differ from the attractive female therapist on several competency items, but the attractive male therapist did. The attractive directive and nondirective male therapists were significantly rated more highly than the attractive nondirective female therapist. The present findings are also consistent with Rae's (1975) trend suggesting that female subjects preferred an unattractive female therapist than an attractive female therapist.

Thus, for male therapists, the "beautiful is good" stereotype seems to hold, as was expected; but for female therapists, sex-role stereotypes seem more valid. It is possible that the videotape presentation accentuated or made prominent in the subjects' minds the discrepancy of

an attractive woman doing a competent job on a male-typed task or, as Rae (1975) pointed out, the characteristics which are incongruent with the role (male) of a trusted therapist.

The limitations related to the present findings are primarily a function of the fact that only one attractive and one unattractive male and female therapist were included. Future research might include at least two attractive and two unattractive male and female therapists to insure that findings do not result from particular attributes of the attractive and unattractive stimulus-persons employed. However, given the previously discussed discrepancy between methodologies employing photographs and those employing videotapes, it is important that any replication studies employ a videotape presentation. Further, therapeutic style apparently was not sufficient to manipulate subjects' perceptions of the sex-typed qualities of the therapist's role. Since the sex-typed nature of the task seems to be important (Hill & Lando, 1976), it may be interesting to effectively manipulate the sex-typed qualities of the therapist's role in future studies.

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TABLE 1

JUDGES' MEAN THERAPIST RATINGS FOR THE DIRECTIVE AND NONDIRECTIVE VIDEOTAPES

Variable	Female				Male			
	1		2		1		2	
	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N
Skillfulness	3.1	2.3	2.8	2.9	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.4
Warmth	3.2	2.6	2.5	2.8	3.2	2.1	2.7	2.6
Interest in client	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.4	1.8	2.3	2.6
Credibility	3.3	2.5	3.1	3.3	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.9
Attractiveness	4.5	4.7	2.8	2.5	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.5

NOTE: The lower the score, the more positive the rating.

TABLE 2

FRIEDMAN'S TEST RESULTS FOR FIVE THERAPIST VARIABLES

Variable	χ^2	p
Skillfulness	5.76	> .05
Warmth	9.015	> .05
Interest in client	5.75	> .05
Credibility	2.44	> .05
Attractiveness	17	< .05

NOTE: $df = 7$.

TABLE 3

MEAN "UGLY" RATINGS FOR EACH THERAPIST

Therapist	M
Male number 1	4.063
Male number 2	4.75
Female number 1	4.688
Female number 2	3.771

TABLE 4

A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE INTERACTION OF THE FACTORS OF THERAPIST-SEX AND THERAPIST-ATTRACTIVENESS

Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Liking rating	4,680.78	4,680.78	8.51	.004*
Conceited	.750	.750	.539	.464
Warm	.255	.255	1.149	.70
Ugly	.63	.63	.509	.476
Capable	3.521	3.521	3.017	.084
Dishonest	1.688	1.688	2.046	.154
Nondirective	4.688	4.688	2.45	.119
Involved	.187	.187	.112	.738
Reflecting	6.75	6.75	5.02	.026*
Cold	.130	.13	.067	.796
Anxious	1.688	1.688	1.238	.267
Effective	8.333	8.333	5.563	.019*
Unstructures	.255	.255	.175	.677
Friendly	.333	.333	.236	.627
Inhibited	1.021	1.021	.751	.387
Helpful	6.380	6.380	4.701	.031*
Unsure	10.547	10.547	8.661	.004*
Responsible	2.083	2.083	1.737	.189
Understanding	1.333	1.333	.983	.323
Aloof	1.505	1.505	.83	.363
Unskilled	8.755	8.755	6.124	.014*
Leading	.333	.333	.188	.665
Confident	6.75	6.75	5.338	.022*
Apathetic	1.505	1.505	.947	.332
Structured	.047	.047	.028	.867
Competent	7.13	7.13	4.913	.028*
Intelligent	3.255	3.255	3.088	.081
Indifferent	.521	.521	.309	.579
Strong	2.521	2.521	1.856	.175
Obnoxious	6.38	6.38	3.221	.074
Directive	2.521	2.521	1.811	.18

NOTE: df(1, 166).

*p <.05.

TABLE 5

MEAN RATINGS ON SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES FOR THE FACTORS OF THERAPIST-ATTRACTIVENESS AND THERAPIST-SEX

Variable	Attractive		Unattractive	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Liking rating	60.771	37.583	59.897	56.458
Reflecting	2.729	3.458	2.729	2.708
Effective	2.896	3.75	3.08	3.104
Helpful	2.542	3.313	2.708	2.75
Unsure	4.479	4.0	4.271	4.729
Unskilled	4.396	3.938	4.167	4.563
Confident	2.438	3.0	2.708	2.521
Competent	2.688	3.313	2.854	2.708

NOTE: Except for the Liking Rating variable, the lower the score, the more agreement shown with the variable.

TABLE 6

DUNCAN'S MULTIPLE RANGE TEST FOR SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES AS A FUNCTION OF THERAPIST SEX AND ATTRACTIVENESS

Variable	Attractive Female vs Attractive Male		Attractive Female vs Unattractive Female		Attractive Female vs Unattractive Male	
	W	p	W	p	W	p
Liking rating	23.188	< .001	18.875	< .001	22.313	< .05
Reflecting	.729	< .01	.75	< .01	.729	< .05
Effective	.854	< .01	.667	< .05	.565	< .05
Helpful	.771	< .05	.563	< .05	.605	> .05
Unsure	.479	< .05	.729	< .05	.271	> .05
Unskilled	.458	< .05	.622	< .05	.229	> .05
Confident	.562	< .05	.479	< .05	.292	> .05
Competent	.625	< .05	.605	< .05	.459	> .05

TABLE 7

A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE FACTOR OF THERAPEUTIC STYLE

Variable	SS	MS	F	p
Liking rating	139.563	139.563	.226	.635
Conceited	6.309	6.309	5.04	.026*
Warm	.319	.319	.768	.382
Ugly	.045	.045	.034	.854
Capable	.032	.032	.026	.871
Dishonest	.415	.415	.490	.485
Nondirective	20.777	20.777	10.823	.001*
Involved	.242	.242	.142	.706
Reflecting	5.39	5.39	4.041	.046*
Cold	5.202	5.202	2.642	.106
Anxious	6.757	6.757	5.5	.020*
Effective	.018	.018	.012	.913
Unstructured	16.55	16.55	11.95	.001*
Friendly	.60	.60	.434	.511
Inhibited	.072	.072	.052	.819
Helpful	.606	.606	.415	.520
Unsure	12.077	12.077	10.605	.001*
Responsible	2.753	2.753	2.313	.13
Understanding	6.005	6.005	4.538	.035*
Aloof	.057	.057	.03	.863
Unskilled	3.355	3.355	2.215	.139
Leading	18.760	18.760	10.694	.001*
Confident	18.595	18.595	14.869	.001*
Apathetic	.908	.908	.569	.452
Structured	19.354	19.354	12.664	.001*
Competent	1.052	1.052	.683	.410
Intelligent	2.626	2.626	2.468	.48
Indifferent	.05	.05	.03	.862
Strong	7.97	7.97	5.961	.016*
Obnoxious	.951	.951	.471	.494
Directive	17.401	17.401	12.513	.001*

NOTE: df (1, 166).

*p < .05